

Cambridge Human Rights Commission

January 15, 2026

Virtual Public Meeting

Present: Chair Mercedes Evans, and Commissioners Sue Mapel, Beverly Sealey, Stephen Curran, Judith Laguerre, Olinda Marshall, and Sam Myers.

City Staff: Executive Director Carolina Almonte, Attorney Investigator Vanessa Carr, and Deidre Travis Brown, Chief of Equity and Inclusion.

Members of the Public: None

Absent: Chair Stefanie Haug, and Commissioners Caroline Palavicino Maggio, and Yasmin Padamsee Forbes

1. Call to Order

- Chair Evans called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

2. Public Comments

- No public comment

3. Review and approval of December 2025 Minutes

- The Commission reviewed the minutes from the meeting in December 2025. Commissioner Curran commented that the minutes should be amended to clarify that AI Carr's report was added after the fact and not presented during the December meeting.
- Chair Evans moved to approve the minutes; Commissioner Mapel seconded. All voted in favor.

4. Staff Reports

- ED Almonte
 - CHRC did not receive the HUD Partnership grant this year. No word from HUD on any other funding changes.
- AI Carr
 - 22 new intakes in the last month, 5 of which were accepted for investigation.
 - 3 New Cases were filed.
 - Public Accommodations Cases (2)
 - Disability Discrimination: C alleges R's discriminated against him by failing to provide an automatic door opener on the inside of the store
 - Disability Discrimination: C is disabled and needs to use a tricycle to get around. C alleges that R's

discriminated against her by prohibiting her from parking her tricycle on the premises and refusing to provide her services if she does.

- Housing (1)
 - Racial Discrimination: C alleges that R's charge her/her family, the only Black family in the building, more in rent than her white counterparts
- o 2 Lack of Probable Cause Determinations were issued.
 - Public Accommodations: Gender Identity Discrimination
 - C alleged that she was discriminated against by R's because of her transgender identity when they stopped providing her support services.
 - Outcome: Investigation revealed that R's did provide C services consistent with their rules and policies.
 - Housing: Family Status Discrimination
 - C alleged that she was discriminated against by R's when they rejected her housing application because she was pregnant.
 - Outcome: Investigation reveals that two applicants were ahead of C on the waitlist and R's followed their procedures regarding selection of applicants from the waitlist.
- o 1 Pre-Determination Settlement Agreement was executed.
 - Public Accommodations: National Origin
 - C alleged that R's discriminated against her by rudely insinuating that her tipping etiquette was related to her not being from the US.
 - The settlement agreement included anti-discrimination training, monetary compensation for \$250.00, and a letter of apology.
- o We have 12 active cases.

5. Conversation with Deidre Travis Brown

- Chief Travis Brown explained that all the departments under E&I were brought together because of a shared mission and purpose. The goal is to work together to support DEI in the City. She explained that the restructuring was because several roles were engaged in the same type of work and could be condensed.
- Commissioner Mapel asked about difference between the E&I Department and the Office of Equity and Inclusion.

- o Chief Travis Brown explained that the Department is the larger entity, and OEI is internal City DEI work and a little community engagement too.
- Chair Evans asked about the timing of the restructuring.
 - o Chief Travis Brown admitted that the timing was not great and that she learned a few lessons, such as inform stakeholders (employees and commissioners) before an announcement goes out, have the new position applications drafted and ready to go, and have a plan to speak with the press.
- Chair Evans expressed her disappointment with the way the restructuring happened, acknowledged that real people were impacted, and offered to share her expertise since she has worked in DEI for 25 years.
- Commissioner Myers expressed his commitment to this work and the value of the team members that were let go. He said that with the state of the federal government, it was shocking to see a personnel shift in DEI when we should be protecting it. Commissioner Myers stated that Sarah Binney was integrated into the community. He asked why people were let go when new similar positions are opening up and they could have transitioned.
 - o Chief Travis Brown explained that the work will continue and new investments in DEI are being made – see American Freedman’s Commission. She also stated that the new positions are at a higher level than the old ones, but former employees are welcome to apply. She confirmed that 7 people were let go.

6. Old Business

- Working Group update
 - o Al Carr shared that there will be an article about the working group published in the Cambridge Life Winter Edition.
 - o Chair Evans shared that the group is working on developing public facing messaging, finalizing definitions, building a communication plan, and producing a final work product before end of FY26.
- Coalition of HRCs
 - o Chair Evans expressed concerns about contributing financially to community engagement events. She also asked Commissioners to begin thinking about we should invite (25 people max) to the event.
 - o Al Carr confirmed that the event will feature a fair housing angle.

- Commissioner Myers shared that he thinks this community engagement strategy would be helpful for other issues as well, including Anti-Semitism and the war in Gaza.
 - Commissioner Sealey suggested CHRC invite Councilor McGovern, her pastor at St. Paul AME Church and former Councilor Ayesha Wilson to the event.
 - New guidelines for guest speakers
 - Commissioners took a vote to table discussion on the guideline until the next meeting.
- Role call vote of Commissioners:
- Curran - in favor
 - Evans - in favor
 - Laguerre - in favor
 - Marshall - in favor
 - Myers - in favor
 - Mapel - in favor
 - Sealey - in favor
- Commission vacancy
 - ED Almonte stated that the Commissioner vacancy has been posted and reminded Commissioners that under the updated charter rules, the City Council may pull this for discussion.
 - March Meeting
 - ED Almonte reported that there will be a presentation by CDD on Cambridge demographics at the March Commission meeting.

7. New Business

- City Manager Invite
 - ED Almonte confirmed that the CM is permitted to attend the meeting, so long as his schedule allows.
 - Commissioner Sealey Beverly suggested inviting the CM to the April commission meeting.
- Fair Housing Month
 - ED Almonte asked Commissioner if they would still like CHRC to plan the resource fair and panel for Fair Housing Month.
 - Chair Evans suggested hiring a temp employee to help plan the resource fair.
 - Commissioner Marshall suggested holding the fair housing fair in May.

8. Adjournment

- Commissioner Marshall moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner

Curran seconded.

- Meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.